

DURANGO

By xxxxx

Directed by xxxxx

John Smith Theatre

This Korean-influenced production was a metaphorically exhilarating play in which brothers struggle against the ties put on them by society, and their own culture. Two brothers, Jimmy and Isaac, live with their widower father, Boo-Seng Lee, and try to find some meaning in their own lives. Isaac, whose father expects him to become a doctor, becomes quite volatile as he is chained down by expectations and family honor. He is not intellectually gifted and he simply wants to explore the world of music; however, with his controlling father, he finds this impossible to do, and therefore vents his frustration through excessive cussing and indulgence into pornography. On the other hand, Jimmy is naturally brilliant, yet he too is being forced to do something in which he has found to be disdainful because “he must get a scholarship.” Because of his secret homosexual tendencies, Jimmy has found it difficult to go swimming after being scarred by others ostracizing him. Even then, Jimmy’s innate kindness won’t let him disappoint his ultra-conservative father by quitting swimming and revealing his sexuality.

Boo-Seng Lee, after being fired from his job, decides not to tell his children of his unemployment, but instead take them on a road trip up to Durango, Colorado. Throughout this trip, the audience sees that the dead mother’s influence has disappeared from this family; however, this kind and caring influence begins to creep back into the picture as these three are forced to put up with each other. Because of the set lives these people were given (Isaac must be a doctor, Jimmy must be a professional swimmer, and Boo-Seng must work to pay for these children’s college tuitions), the family has found it difficult to escape from these routes and express their true emotions. Through their trip to Durango, secrets are all revealed; this family eventually comes closer together as they begin to see who their family members really are. We also see that the father, too, is chained down by society by believing that his offsprings must be a certain way. Before long, he realizes that getting into college, making money, and being the best at a sport are not the things people should cherish in life. Instead, he

realizes that simply spending time with the family and expressing own thoughts can bring meaning into life.

The actors did a wonderful job with the emotions. Isaac managed to hit his target emotion of frustration when it was needed; that's not to say that his emotions were flat line. Isaac also managed to get across his more sensitive side, and we can see this when Jimmy reveals to him his sexual preferences. Jimmy on the other hand was quite the opposite from Isaac. His emotions were younger in nature – they were shy, yet had a curious and lively aspect to them. Boo-Seng's emotions were more complex, but the actor still managed to express his emotions very well. Boo-Seng's emotions were strong and mighty on the superficial level, though there was also a sense of sadness and sensitivity under his veil of strength.

The blocking in this play was less impressive, yet satisfactory to say the least. During some scenes there was very little blocking and thus the physical actions that Stanislavsky spoke of were not taken advantage of. Also there were many instances in which the characters were all in a line, when they should not have been. There were certain scenes in which clearly one was in power, though through the way some scenes were blocked, just by watching the audience could not see any levels of powers. Though when the blocking was good, especially scenes in which the characters were in the car, the use of the triangle was excellent. The car scenes seemed to be the only scenes when the actors reacted to their environment, adding more reality to this play. In addition, the blocking was highly metaphorical, which I thought added a nice touch to this play. There was one scene which stood out, in which Jimmy tears the pages from his notebook, which have sketches of naked men, and throws them out of the car window. In this scene, although it was not said, Jimmy realizes that he must suppress his sexual desires, and continue on with his life.

The set and costume designs were both very simply and straightforward. The set changed with each scene though were very superficial. When there needed to be a car, there was an actual car; when there needed to be a bed, there was an actual bed. Although the costumes were simple too, they did tell the audience a bit about each character. The father had a tucked in button-down shirt with khaki pants – thus emphasizing his ultra-conservative and uptight nature. Isaac wore a button down plaid

shirt which went to say that his character is a bit more down to earth. Jimmy too wore a costume which showed a bit about his character. On his shirt was the logo of a comic company – emphasizing his interests in the arts. Although the set was simple, the use of lighting truly added to the mood. There was a certain scene in which Jimmy nearly self-destructs because of his sexuality; in this scene the lights flashes red to emphasize Jimmy's frustration. Other than that, the lighting too was very straightforward – when it was night, the lights were dimmer, when it was day, the lights were brighter.

All in all, this play was fantastic. Although I would not recommend this play for children, I would highly recommend this play for teenagers and young adults. I believe that this play will connect well with those who are suffering the chains of society. With a beautiful connection to the real world, along with the few Korean-inspired comical lines, this play has a wonderful balance between comedy and tragedy, which will leave anyone leaving the theater taking about it for hours.

Aladdin

By xxxxx

Directed by xxxxx

The Blue Buffalo Theatre

Walking into the theater, I thought to myself how difficult it must be for the actors and the director to constantly feel the pressure to live up to the classic Disney movie we have all come to know and love without losing the wonders of live theater.

Ready to see a lame reproduction of Aladdin I was pleasantly surprised with the opening song of the show. The wondering merchant of Agrabah opens the show explaining to us the story of our two main characters Aladdin and Jasmine, and their forbidden love. This first scene immediately sets the mood for the entire play. Simply by taking a look at his costume you can tell that the play is set in the past. The viewer can also observe that the entire show will be full of mystery and magic.

Watching the story of a common street rat, Aladdin, fall in love with the princess of Agrabah, Jasmine. Using a little help from Abu, his pet monkey, Genie, a genie who grants Aladdin 3 wishes, and a magic flying rug, Carpet, he tries to convince her that he is a foreign prince longing for her hand in marriage. But Jafar, the Sultan's personal

adviser who secretly had the longing to be sultan himself, saw right through Aladdin's act and exposes him to the princess. Aladdin has to rely on his own personality to charm and win over Jasmine which he does with out any issue.

Watching Aladdin and Jasmine's chemistry on stage kept me engaged in their relationship I had forgotten I was watching a stage show. I could clearly find the subtle yet significant character they each took on. And they're target emotions were undoubtedly reached through powerful trigger words. But I would have to say that Genie undeniably stole the show. He not only had a well-built character but also had the vibe of the entire show running through every word he expressed. Not to mention his fantastic sense of comedic timing.

Watching the costumes adapt from the movie to stage was fascinating. When Aladdin became a prince he wore a completely white outfit which showed a purity of his character along with superiority over his street rat outfit.

Over all, I would recommend this show to anyone looking for a good, clean laugh. Not to mention the romantic story of forbidden love prevailing.